

# DAIRY FOODS AND YOUR SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY

## Wellness Policies ... Coming to a School Near You!

By the 2006-07 school year, every school in the federal meal programs must develop a policy for (1) nutrition education, (2) physical activity and (3) nutrition guidelines for all foods sold on campus (not just in the cafeteria). Congress required wellness policies in a 2004 law dealing with child nutrition programs.<sup>1</sup> But lawmakers left it up to local school authorities to develop the policies. In other words, each school must have guidelines for foods it sells – but it's up to the school what those guidelines are. (Of course, federal standards for school meals and similar regulations remain in place).

## Milk's on Our Mind

At the National Dairy Council, we spend a lot of time thinking about both milk and wellness. Since 1916, our mission has always gone beyond just promoting milk (although we're proud of what we do to increase milk consumption!) – we've stressed balanced diets, the need for physical activity and other aspects of wellness.

Milk can and should be an important part of a wellness policy, and a strategy for achieving your wellness goals. School is where many students get virtually their entire dairy consumption for the day. NDC would like to help make milk work in schools!

## Why Milk?

Milk is a nutrient-rich powerhouse. **Three daily servings** of dairy – as recommended by the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans – provide a major portion of the Daily Value for critical nutrients: for **calcium**, 90%; **potassium**, 33%; **magnesium**, 24%; **Vitamin A**, 30%; **phosphorus**, 60%; **protein**, 48%; **Vitamin D**, 75%; **Vitamin B12**, 39%; and **riboflavin**, 72%.<sup>2</sup>

That's why major medical and health professional groups like the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dietetic Association and the National Medical Association support 3-A-Day of Dairy.<sup>3</sup> And Congress agrees. The same law that requires school wellness policies also continues to require that milk be offered with school meals. Schools now have complete flexibility on which fat varieties of milk they offer, as long as they provide a variety to students. Congress also encouraged schools to offer flavored and lactose-free milk.<sup>4</sup>

## Meeting a Need

Milk deserves attention in a wellness policy because **kids need more milk!** At the same time that childhood obesity has been on the rise, milk consumption has been on the decline.<sup>5</sup>

Among kids 6-11, 71% of girls and 62% of boys don't meet calcium requirements.<sup>6</sup> Among adolescents 12-19, it's even worse – 68% of males and 88% of females don't meet calcium requirements! Now is when young people need dairy's unique nutrient package for their growth and development. Dairy's health benefits throughout life include **bone health**, **lower risk of hypertension** (high blood pressure) and, as new science increasingly shows, a **healthy weight level**.<sup>7</sup>

Dairy foods are a **naturally nutrient-rich** way to promote wellness. Dairy contributes only 9% of calories in the nation's food supply, but 72% of the calcium.<sup>8</sup> And it's not just calcium – for example, the need for more potassium was a big reason the new Dietary Guidelines **increased the number of dairy servings suggested for most Americans**.<sup>9</sup>

## Nuts and Bolts

To best meet children's nutritional needs, there are real-life choices and tradeoffs to be made in schools. How to get kids to drink more milk, and eat more fruits and vegetables? What would policy changes in snack food choices mean for school revenue? What kind of wellness policies will help schools change outcomes?

A wellness policy should not be a document in somebody's file cabinet. It needs to work – to make a difference. A wellness policy should be designed to promote better nutrition ... and also be practical, recognizing a school's current situation. A real-world policy is what schools need.

State and regional dairy council representatives are ready with ideas ... technical assistance ... practical support. They would like to be a resource to help craft a wellness policy that's both visionary and workable.

Here are a few ideas for how milk can help make a wellness policy work.

## Make Higher Milk Consumption a Strategic Goal

Design a wellness policy to **encourage more dairy product consumption**. Promoting healthy dairy products – not just in the cafeteria but through vending and a la carte sales – is a good way to reduce consumption of empty-calorie beverages. And milk is a marker for a healthy diet: Milk consumers tend to eat healthy throughout the day.

► Among children 4-18 whose health was measured in the massive NHANES study, milk drinkers had significantly lower body weight and body mass index (BMI) than children who didn't drink milk. In these same groups, "bad" cholesterol (LDL) was significantly lower among milk drinkers, even though milk contains some saturated fat.<sup>10</sup>

## Improve School Meal Program Participation Through Milk's New Look!

Many studies have shown that students who eat in the cafeteria have better diets – they get more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other healthy foods (besides, of course, more milk!).<sup>11</sup> **Shouldn't a measurable increase in school meal participation be part of a wellness policy?**

In a pilot test involving 100,000 students, NDC and the School Nutrition Association helped schools offer milk in a single-serve plastic container, add an extra flavor, insure proper refrigeration and merchandise milk in attractive retail-style coolers. The elementary schools in the study increased milk sales by 15% and the secondary schools saw a 22% increase. (The average across all schools was 18%.)

But that wasn't all. In these schools, **participation in school lunch programs rose by 4.8 percentage points in secondary schools**. In elementary schools, where participation was already at very high levels, participation rose 1.5 percentage points.<sup>12</sup>

That means that what NDC calls the New Look of School Milk – packaging, flavors, merchandising – was bringing more kids into the cafeteria. Those kids weren't just getting more milk. Their overall diets were improving as they got balanced meals rather than buying lunch from vending machines.

Even before wellness policies take effect, hundreds of school districts nationwide are switching to the New Look of School Milk. They're finding it not only helps them meet nutritional goals, but consumption increases make it financially sustainable as well.

## Give Kids Plenty of Choices

Remember Henry Ford's famous saying that you can buy a Model T in any color you want, as long as it's black? That's probably not the best approach to take in marketing to kids! Instead, we recommend giving kids a range of milk choices – plenty of flavors, a good variety of fat levels.

- Most kids are already used to drinking a particular variety of milk. By limiting kids' choices to varieties they don't drink at home, the risk is that they may be less likely to drink milk, and more likely to choose a less-healthy beverage. For example, 2% milk is still consumed at about three times the volume of 1%,<sup>13</sup> so many kids in your school are used to drinking it.
- Many groups are interested in promoting low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk. Schools can choose to promote these varieties without prohibiting other fat levels.
- In the same authoritative NHANES study we mentioned before, consumers of 2% milk had lower body weight and BMI than non-milk-drinkers. And there was no difference in either body weight or BMI between drinkers of 2% and 1% or fat-free milk.<sup>14</sup>

## Flavors Sell!

More and more schools are adding milk flavors – not just traditional chocolate, but strawberry, banana, vanilla, mocha and others. They're finding that kids love the new flavor experiences and milk sales go up! From a wellness standpoint, flavors are a good decision even though flavored milk has some added sugar.

- A peer-reviewed study found children who consume flavored milk got more calcium than those who didn't ... but **no more added sugars, and no more total fat!** The researchers wrote that flavored milk was probably displacing sweetened soft drinks and fruit drinks from these kids' diets.<sup>15</sup>
- In the NDC-SNA pilot test, the 150 schools involved found that an additional flavor contributed to an 18% average increase in milk sales.<sup>16</sup>

In their wellness policies, many schools may **set limits on total sugars or added sugars** in beverages and snacks. Some schools that have already reviewed these issues have decided – wisely, we think – not to subject milk to any sugar limits that would keep flavored milk away from students. These schools do not want to risk students missing out on the calcium, potassium, magnesium and other nutrients in good-tasting flavored milk. In the same way, by keeping sugar limits at a reasonable level, students will continue to enjoy healthy and great-tasting products such as yogurt that is often tolerated better by students who are lactose maldigesters (“lactose intolerant”).

## Serving Sizes: Keep It Real

We've all become more sensitive to portion sizes in the last few years, as some experts have pointed to super-sized products as one reason for the obesity crisis. In designing their wellness policies, many schools may take a hard look at the portion sizes of products they will offer. Extremely low limits on vended or a la carte products could limit the use of milk to boost wellness. The answer may be to either exempt milk from portion-size rules or have a higher limit, such as 16 ounces.

*Please use this information to get involved with the development of school wellness policies in your community, whether it's attending school board meetings, writing a letter, or interacting with the school nutrition team. Contact a local Dairy Council at [www.NutritionExplorations.org](http://www.NutritionExplorations.org) for more information.*

## Healthy Snacks: Remember Dairy!

Milk is the cornerstone of the cafeteria – and we'll get to that in a minute. But milk and other dairy products hold great potential to help construct a portfolio of healthy snacking options that can meet both nutritional and fiscal needs.

- Milk vending will soon be protected by law! Beginning in July 2005, the new child nutrition law says an exclusive beverage sales contract can't be used to limit a school's ability to sell milk anytime, anywhere on school property or at school events.<sup>17</sup>
- Cheese is a nutrient-dense, healthy snack that is popular among kids. More data from the NHANES study: Frequent cheese consumers had better levels of “good” cholesterol (HDL) than people who didn't eat cheese.<sup>18</sup> Other evidence suggests cheeses may protect against dental caries.<sup>19</sup> And of course, the low lactose content of cheese makes it a good way for lactose-intolerant individuals to get calcium, phosphorus, Vitamin D and other nutrients.

Some schools have considered an upper limit on the fat and saturated fat content of all foods. Many of these schools have exempted nuts from these limitations – and the same logic would suggest exempting cheese as well. Like nuts, cheese can be a popular item as schools attempt to stock and offer healthy snacks.

Of course, it's also worth remembering that the Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggest limits on total fat and saturated fat that apply to your entire diet over a period of time – not to individual foods on particular occasions. Schools are likely to find that a dietary limitation – besides being more consistent with the Dietary Guidelines – is much more workable in the real world than a limit on individual foods.

## We're Here to Help

NDC would like to help in developing school wellness policies. The dairy council contact information below can be used to tap into a world of information resources and practical help in boosting students' wellness through naturally nutrient-rich dairy products.

1 Public Law 108-265, Child Nutrition and Reauthorization Act of 2004, Sec. 204 (42 USC 1751 note).

2 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, USDA Nutrient Data Laboratory, 2004. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 17. Cited in National Dairy Council, “Improve Diet Quality with 3-A-Day™ of Dairy.”

3 National Dairy Council, “Health Professionals Support 3-A-Day for Stronger Bones.” Accessed May 11, 2005, at <http://www.3aday.org/yourhealth/support.asp>

4 Public Law 108-265, Sec. 102 (42 USC 1754).

5 M. Murphy, J. Douglass, M. Latulippe, S. Barr, R. Johnson, C. Frye, “Beverages as a Source of Energy and Nutrients in Diets of Children and Adolescents.” Program No. 275.4, 2005 Experimental Biology Meeting, San Diego, CA.

6 National Dairy Council, “The Children's Health Paradox: Overweight, Yet Undernourished.” Accessed May 13, 2005, at <http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org/NationalDairyCouncil/Nutrition/Child/FINALinsert.pdf>.

7 “The Benefits of Dairy Foods in Health Promotion.” Dairy Council Digest, Vol. 75, No. 3, May/June 2004.

8 “Dairy Foods' Contribution to Nutrient Dense Diets.” Dairy Council Digest, Vol. 75, No. 1, January/February 2004.

9 U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005.

10 National Dairy Council, unpublished data based on National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES, 1988-1994 and NHANES, 1999-2000) and Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (CSFII, 1994-96, 1998).

11 Burghardt J, Devaney B, eds., “The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study,” Am J Clin Nutr. 1995; 61 (suppl): 213s-220s.

12 National Dairy Council, “Fact Sheet: School Milk Pilot Test.” Sep. 19, 2002.

13 International Dairy Foods Association, Dairy Facts: 2004 Edition.

14 National Dairy Council, unpublished data based on National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES, 1988-1994 and NHANES, 1999-2000) and Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (CSFII, 1994-96, 1998).

15 R. Johnson, C. Frary, M.Q. Wang, “The nutritional consequences of flavored-milk consumption by school-aged children and adolescents in the United States.” Journal of the American Dietetic Association, Vol. 102, No. 6, June 2002.

16 National Dairy Council, “Fact Sheet: School Milk Pilot Test” Sep. 19, 2002.

17 Public Law 108-265, Sec. 102 (42 USC 1754).

18 National Dairy Council, unpublished data based on National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys.

19 Bowen, W. H. Scandinavian J. Nutr. 46: 178, 2002; Kashket, S., and D. P. DePaola, Nutr. Rev. 60: 97, 2002. Cited in “The Benefits of Dairy Foods in Health Promotion,” Dairy Council Digest, Vol. 75, No. 3, May/June 2004.